COLCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION
Budget Workshop #2

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KYLE FURMAN
TOWN CLERK

Thursday, February 26, 2026
6:00 PM
William J. Johnston Middle School

MINUTES

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT : Chair Stefanie Tracey-Calash, Vice-Chair Christopher Rivers, Secretary Cody McNeely, Cari Duigou, Gussie Gilberti, Michelle Millington and Nancy Nelson

ADMINISTRATION PRESENT : Superintendent Daniel P. Sullivan, III, Assistant Superintendent Jessica L. Kuckel, Director of Pupil Services Eve Hurley, Bacon Academy (BA) Principal Amy Begué, BA Assistant Principal Jennifer Martin, BA Assistant Principal Michael Mal, William J Johnston Middle School (WJJMS) Assistant Principal Bonnie McAneny, Jack Jackter Intermediate School (JJIS) Principal Stacy Ewings, JJIS Associate Principal Melissa Cyr, Colchester Elementary School (CES) Principal Judy O'Meara, CES Assistant Principal Kelly Bahre

OTHERS PRESENT : Director of Finance and Operations Rachel Linkkila, Instructional Technology Coordinator Barbara Johnson, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent Alyssa Butova, Human Resources Coordinator Pauline Goetz, Director of Educational Operations Andrew Barillari, Athletic Director Kevin Burke

1. **MEETING OPENING**
   1.1. Call to Order
   S.Tracey-Calash called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM

   1.2 Roll Call
   All Board members present.

   1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

2. **PRIORITY DISCUSSION**
   2.1. Presentation from Administrative Team on Following Budgets: BA, Athletics, Special Education, Facilities, Technology
   Assistant Superintendent Kuckel gave an overview of the district goals and academic performance. Principal Begué gave Bacon Academy's projections, priorities and progress. Athletic Director Burke highlighted that the referendum for the fields passed and that there will be additional responsibilities and implications from that. He also went over the programs and participation. Director of Special Education Hurley went over projections and priorities. Director of Educational Operations Barillari went over facilities employees and priorities. IT Coordinator Johnson gave an overview of

technology priorities.

2.2. Board Q&A on Following Budgets: BA, Athletics, Special Education, Facilities, Technology

- C.Rivers asked about maintenance and capital outlay on page 56, specifically the BMS upgrade at Bacon Academy (BA). It was noted that the upgrade is a must. He recommended removing the floor projects and pushing them to next year.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked for clarification regarding the WJ BMS upgrade. It was explained that the upgrade is no longer needed due to adjustments District Maintainer Jake Richards was able to make, as the issue was related to the network bouncing the equipment out rather than equipment failure.
- C.Rivers inquired about heating oil costs across the buildings and the decrease in heating costs. The savings were attributed to lower market prices and proactive monitoring of the market to lock in a favorable rate.
- C.Rivers asked about the BA electric rate, page 37, line 245, and the reason for the change. It was explained that the district is working with a new electrical provider to secure rates. Meter and rate data from the past two years were provided, but the descriptions were not updated.
- C.Rivers asked whether staffing levels remain the same at BA. It was clarified that one position will not be refilled due to a retirement, and line 53 reflects a part-time employee who is not returning.
- C.Rivers referenced page 34, line 103, regarding $5,000 for new guitars. This funding supports new courses being introduced next year at BA, requiring purchasing of those instruments to run the course.
- M.Millington asked about page 35, line 171, regarding the bus contract with Grasso Tech and noted a $19,000 savings. She asked how many students attend. It was explained that the amount was removed from BA and shifted to a system-wide line. Reimbursement relates to the tech parents' travel stipend. On page 50, line 74, there is a $30,000 increase, with $18,000 from BA moved into that line.
- C.McNeely asked about overtime for maintenance related to snow removal and noted that this must be monitored, as it has been a difficult winter.
- C.McNeely asked about stipends for maintenance workers and whether they are governed by union agreement. It was explained that stipends are addressed through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for additions, and a train-the-trainer model is being explored.
- M.Millington asked about page 36 and what Virtual High School is. It was explained that it expands course offerings at BA and is also used for credit recovery. Enrollment flexes based on student requests. The license covers 20 seats per semester.
- G.Gilberti asked about page 36, lines 205, 206, and 209 regarding guest clinicians. Line 205 supports the music department by bringing in professional musicians to work directly with BA students instead of conducting a field trip. Line 206 covers piano tuning. Line 209 refers to NCCJ (National Conference for Community and Justice), which has partnered with the district for years to provide student training to support school climate and culture.
- N.Nelson asked about page 33, line 47, and what MOU stands for. It was clarified that MOU stands for Memorandum of Understanding. She also referenced page 33, lines 56 and 57, regarding two ML teachers. It was discussed at the last meeting that there are two MLL teachers that serve the district, so their salary is

spread throughout each of the schools.

- C.McNeely asked who the MOU is for. It was clarified that it is for the Athletic Director, whose responsibilities extend beyond the regular teaching day.
- C.McNeely requested clarification regarding the ISS Coordinator role at BA. The ISS Coordinator works with students in grades 9–12 assigned to In-School Suspension, ensuring they complete their academic work and reflecting with them on behavior and improvement strategies. The role includes coordination with teachers regarding missed classwork and providing mentorship-style support throughout the day. The individual also serves as an assistant coach. A question was raised about how many students utilized ISS last year.
- C.McNeely asked about the 4.5 Office Professional (OP) positions, noting that BA is the only school with this staffing level. The roles include: one administrator's office professional; one handling attendance, dismissal, and sign-ins/outs; two staff members in the counseling office managing high student volume, registrations, withdrawals, record maintenance, counselor support, awards ceremonies, graduation coordination, college readiness processes, transcripts, and presentations; and 0.5 FTE dedicated to financial responsibilities including deposits, requisitions, and record accuracy.
- C.McNeely asked about the scope of administrative support at BA. It was explained that the two Assistant Principals (APs) are responsible for student supervision, campus safety, lunch supervision, conflict resolution, investigations, and discipline. They oversee more than 80 evening events annually, with average 10-hour workdays extending to events that run until 9:00 PM. The addition of turf fields will increase the need for evening supervision. They conduct over 600 observations, evaluations, and meetings per year and chair more than 200 PPT and 504 meetings annually. Responsibilities also include MTSS, special education scheduling, PLCs, school climate, and discipline for approximately half the student body each. One AP oversees students with significant needs, supports special education, and chairs PPT meetings, while the other oversees testing, scheduling, 504 meetings, state testing, and professional development. It was emphasized that the workload exceeds what one AP could manage and includes legal mandates, climate leadership, and maintaining a strong BA community presence.
- C.Duigo asked about page 35, line 179, and whether there is a list of clubs offered and whether clubs raise their own funds. A document outlining all clubs and athletic offerings is posted on the website. Offerings are based on enrollment and interest.
- S.Tracey-Calash noted that excess cost is approximately $500,000 and asked about non-resident tuition not being fully reflected. It was clarified that the numbers have been provided to the town.
- S.Tracey-Calash asked about the MOU with the town regarding debt service for the fields and roof and where it is reflected in the budget. It appears on page 14, lines 230 and 231, and page 53, lines 180 and 181.
- G.Gilberti asked about current out-of-district (OOD) placements. At present, there are 16 students placed out of district.
- C.McNeely noted that there are 383 IEPs and 278 504 plans, totaling 661 students with documented disabilities. A 504 plan provides designated accommodations, while an IEP includes goals and objectives. These students are proportionally distributed across schools, with related service staff working district-wide.
- C.McNeely asked about the BCBA position, which began earlier this month and is fully funded through the SEED grant. Previously, there was one BCBA serving all

schools. Now there are two: one serving Pre-K, CES, and JJIS, and the other serving BA, WJ, and ERTA.

- G.Gilberti asked about page 40, line 63, regarding ESY certified staff. It was clarified that the line reflects cumulative staffing, not a single individual.
- S.Tracey-Calash referenced page 43, lines 197 and 199, noting the 16 outplacements and asking about placement changes from public to private. Public placements are under larger operating agencies such as CREC or attached to another school. Changes may occur based on student needs and progress, including transition programs. Tuition projections are based on trend data and anticipated rate increases, which are typically not finalized until spring. The projections also account for potential new students. A question was raised regarding reimbursement; these costs may qualify for excess cost reimbursement under the state formula.
- G.Gilberti asked about stipends and noted that significant reductions have been made over the last three years. Current stipends include teacher leaders at the elementary level, WJ, and BA. IDEA grant funding supports psychological services for OOD testing and Birth-to-Three.
- M.Millington asked about stipends at BA and whether they are increasing. The stipends are for teacher leaders across all departments, athletic stipends for coaches, and stipends supporting all clubs.

2.3. Citizen Q&A on Following Budgets: BA, Athletics, Special Education, Facilities, Technology

- Jen Emery, union board member, Bacon Academy educator, resident, and parent, spoke about collaboration between the superintendent and the union. She emphasized that cutting teaching positions should be avoided at all costs, stating that class size has a direct impact on student achievement. As class sizes increase, individualized support decreases, which changes the entire classroom dynamic and shifts the focus from meaningful relationships to crowd management. She noted that teachers cannot provide the same level of instruction when stretched beyond their limits. She further stated that teachers support students' social and emotional health and work to bridge learning gaps, often well beyond contractual hours, leading to burnout and turnover that is not sustainable.

  She asked the Board to consider the experience of a child in an overcrowded classroom, noting that students may slip through the cracks, go unchallenged, or struggle quietly. While acknowledging that financial pressures are real, she stated that teachers should not feel punished or required to sacrifice their classroom quality or mental health. Strong schools attract families, and cutting teaching positions compromises the district's ability to provide the high-quality education families expect and deserve. She urged the Board to explore creative solutions that preserve classroom instruction, emphasizing that students will feel the impact of reductions.

- Michael Dubreuil, Colchester, via Zoom referenced the increase in health reserve costs and stated that there has not been enough information presented for the public to fully understand the issue. He asked whether the district is effectively rebuilding the reserve fund as part of a multi-year effort. He suggested

simplifying the explanation from the insurance broker into a clearer presentation so residents can better understand it. He described the concept as having two "buckets": one for the working fund and one for the reserve. He noted that clearly identifying those two numbers may also be helpful for the Town's side of the budget discussions.

- Thom Frickman, Bacon Academy teacher and union president, spoke about the transparent and professional conversations held with the superintendent throughout the process. He described the working relationship as positive, open, forthcoming, and direct, and expressed confidence in that relationship through negotiations and district initiatives. He stated that the relationship is grounded in trust, professionalism, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to students.

  He emphasized that the union's message is clear: teaching positions must be protected. Reductions would have a direct negative impact in the classroom. He also advocated for retaining both Assistant Principals at Bacon Academy, stating that removing one would stretch leadership too thin, slow response times, and make it more difficult for teachers to preserve instructional time.

- Monica Sweden, 10 Vicky Lane, via Zoom asked about the numbers associated with the superintendent's proposed budget and whether it includes staff reductions. It was noted that no reductions have been formally put forth at this stage and that the current situation is a byproduct of a large proposed increase and the likelihood that the Board of Education (BOE) and Board of Finance (BOF) will need to make decisions due to the magnitude of the budget.

  Clarification was provided that the first phase is the superintendent's proposed budget, which has been presented to the BOE. The BOE will determine the number it advances to the BOF. The BOF holds bottom-line authority and will determine what it considers an appropriate allocation, at which point the BOE would make decisions regarding potential reductions.

- Kaelea Tewksbury, teacher at Colchester Elementary School and speaking as a mother, shared her gratitude for building her life in the community. She referenced numerous educators and staff members by name across the district, including Wheeler, Bakaj, Kehoe, Barrows, Santos, Flaherty, Clough, Aragundi, Shannon, McAlpine, Shane, DiFranco, Knickerbocker, Lesser, Bretthauser, Anderson, Adams, Collins, Guinan, Guinness, Goode, Schlackter, Groves, Bennett, Hebb, Graham, Lincoln, as well as maintenance and cafeteria staff. She emphasized that budget lines represent real people who serve students every day.

- Babs McNeely, Windham Avenue, via Zoom asked whether, if the additional $5 million were to pass through referendum and be added to the budget, it would save people's jobs. It was clarified that the current proposed budget does not include reductions beyond those identified to date and reflects transparency about potential reductions. The BOE will make a recommendation to the BOF, and the BOF will debate and determine the final allocation.

It was stated that if the full proposed budget were maintained, there would be no reductions beyond what is currently identified. The request represents a significant increase, and the district is attempting to be transparent about potential impacts. In response to questions about salary freezes and reductions, it was clarified that no reductions are included in the current proposal and that discussions are ongoing. She also stated that teaching positions should be the last positions considered for reduction, and that other areas should be examined first before any cuts to teachers.

2.4. Board Q&A on the entirety of the Superintendent's Proposed Budget Book
- None

2.5. *Discussion and Possible Action on Insurance Waiver Process
Motion by: M.Millington
Motion to table until the Special Meeting on Tuesday, March 3, 2026
Second: N.Nelson
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

3. **ADJOURNMENT**
Motion by: C.McNeely
Motion to adjourn.
Second: C.Rivers
Roll Call: All in favor
Vote: Motion carried

S.Tracey-Calash adjourned the meeting at 7:56 PM

Respectfully submitted,

AButova

Alyssa Butova
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent